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Antietam

A Poem

By

Nathan Mayer

1894

18TH REGT. C.V.

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Antietam

A Poem

READ BY

Surgeon Nathan Mayer

OCTOBER 11, 1894

AT

The Dedication of a Monument

BY THE

Sixteenth Connecticut

WHERE THEY FOUGHT AT ANTIETAM

September 17, 1862

HARTFORD, CONN.
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Published by the Executive Committee
of the
Sixteenth Connecticut Association.

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DEDICATED

TO

MY BRAVE AND

FAITHFUL COMRADES

WHOSE INDIVIDUAL HISTORY, ENDURANCE, SUFFERINGS, AND LOYAL

DEVOTION IN CAMPAIGNS, IN HOSPITAL, AND IN PRISON,

NO ONE HAD BETTER OPPORTUNITIES TO KNOW —

The Sixteenth Connecticut

Number of Men in Action 779

Number Killed and Wounded 204

MONUMENT
OF THE
16TH CONNECTICUT AT ANTIETAM

Nathan Mayer

Antietam

COMRADES! the value of a thing
Is stamped by sacrifice we bring
In its attainment. If bright gold
Like sand and pebbles 'round us rolled,
And pearls like daisies blossomed nigh,
We should admire — yet let them lie!
'Tis by the effort and the strain,
The reaching forth with might and main,
The sudden summons into play
Of forces that within us lay,
The risks we boldly gauge and take,
The loss we dare though hearts should break,

Antietam

The living price, whate'er it be,
Which we fling in for victory,
By all we gave and all we lost —
A chosen self-appointed cost —
We mark on scales of human fame
The human value of our aim.

Who senses e'er the merry day
Of childhood's growth or boyhood's play?
When, sweet life stirring, every hour
Brings keener knowledge, firmer power,
And forces weave from span to span
The mightier texture of a man?
Who senses it, till, past recall,
The self-same forces fail and fall?
And who can realize the worth
Of all the miracles on earth

Antietam

That, commonplace and everyday,
Compel our course? The lightsome ray,
The air we breathe, the earth below
That moulds the fruit, the water's flow,
The sense with which we see and deal,
The heart by which we love and feel,
The liberty that makes us man—
All these we have. Yet never can
We know their worth until we need
And have them not; then, stung to deed
By courage born of stress and pain,
We combat, that we might regain
What erst we held at lightsome rate—
A birthright; till avenging fate
Demands for it the bloody fee
Of battle and of victory.

Antietam

'Tis only thus we sense the cost
Of what we held and what we lost.
So was our Union. Mighty source
Of power and glory, and the force
That awed the world, and kept us free
Forefended by the boundless sea.
It was the force that made us great,
Where each one stood for every State,
And every State for each was gaged,
And friendly interests but waged
A war of mutual excellence.
Yet knew we not, and could not sense
The life-need of this bond of power,
Until it broke. Then, in one hour,
With sudden jar the wide-spread land
Did see, and feel, and understand

Antietam

What Union was, what it must be —
Our guard of peace and liberty!
Then, like a sea, the hearts of all
That loved their country, rose. A call
Went forth — from whom, from whence, — who [knows?
It flamed up as the wild wind blows:
From every lip rang forth the cry,
And every heart beat quick reply,
And every hand was raised and swore
Union for aye and evermore!
Far o'er the hills and through the dales,
Resistless as the storm-king sails,
This rally leaped from ear to ear.
It blew out prudence, cast out fear,
Shredded apart with ne'er a strife
The ordinary bonds of life,

Antietam

And stamped stern purpose on each soul
To save the country, one and whole!

This brought us here — a thousand men
With hearts on fire — but bare in ken
Of warlike methods and of arms.
Such as they came from shops and farms,
From busy mart, from college halls,
From life 'tween close-set office walls,
They stood in line — undrilled, untrained.
Though shrapnel burst and bullets rained
Beyond the broad brook's verdant banks,
Among the green corn's waving ranks,
They fill the gap! — Forward! — Advance! —
They send their lead down in the dance
Of Death, who sweeps with crimson hand
O'er the blue hills of Maryland.

Antietam

And forward still! Stern duty placed
Their brave and untried ranks. — Square faced
Against the picked men of the South,
Against their batteries' belching mouth,
Against the fire-lined gray stone wall —
A living line to stand or fall —
They met their fate, this martyr band,
For Union and their Native Land!

And now we come when years have gone,
When all the States are made as one,
When, what was welded in the fire
Of contest, peace has drawn up nigher
And stronger bound — we come intent
To dedicate a monument.
To whom? To those that fell? To all
That hither came to live or fall!

Antietam

To all who in this holy strife
Went forward with their sweet young life
Prepared to give. And, let it show,
Set high in noonday's golden glow
Upon this verdant field of blood,
That life is not the highest good,
But higher, holier, sweeter far
Are life's ideals. Like a star
They point to sacrifice whose fruit
Lives on, though tongues of men are mute.
The future of the land, the fate
Of eras that upon us wait,
The race to come, and Liberty
Secure for all the times to be—
They dwindle human lives to naught!
'Tis to the Cause for which we fought,
The Country in its strength and might
Enthroned on Justice, ruled by Right,

Antietam

A splendid chain of beauteous lands,
Their peoples one in hearts and hands,
The Union of the Continent—
To THESE we set our monument!

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